Promising Practice: Building Strong Employer Relations
Temple University of the Commonwealth System of Higher Education
Health Information Professions (HIP) Career Pathways Program

The Center for Social Policy and Community Development (CSPCD) at Temple University offered training in the career of Medical Office and Accounts through several grants prior to the Health Profession Opportunity Grants Program (HPOG) funded by the Administration for Children and Families' Office of Family Assistance. To strengthen the learning experience of the HPOG students, and to provide them a more substantial work history in this field, CSPCD looked to the partner organizations, health systems and hospitals of Temple University, to create meaningful internships. One of the first responders was Maureen Connell, the director of central business operations for Temple University Physicians.

Ms. Connell enthusiastically embraced and helped shape the vision of what a good internship would be. She had a long history in medical billing. Prior to Temple University, she had worked at Thomas Jefferson University, where she provided internships to high school students from Northeast Philadelphia and was able to hire some of them. At Temple University Physicians, she became director of central business operations, and all staff and positions were evaluated to ensure maximum efficiency and productivity. She loves teaching others the many skills that she has acquired, so working with the HPOG program was a natural fit.

Creating this employer relationship took some time due to busy schedules. Once contact was made, HPOG staff visited Ms. Connell and presented the program, the curriculum, the paperwork that was needed weekly to monitor students (such as time sheets and performance reports), and a sample learning contract. Tentative scheduling dates and protocols were presented for Ms. Connell's input. A review of the HPOG curriculum and a meeting with the HPOG instructor assured her that classroom content was comprehensive.

Collaborating with the program made sense to her because she could be training future employees, assisting students with on-the-job training, and providing her staff with an experience that values mentoring, teaching what they know, and providing guidance for employment. Ms. Connell would be able to hire students who performed well as she watched them learn and grow at the Central Billing Office.

She and her team have provided a nurturing experience for the students. As they train students for success in the workplace, they ensure the students receive an all-around experience that helps them to feel confident in their work, find value in their accomplishments, and feel good about who they were and what they contribute. In addition to assisting students and staff, Ms. Connell serves on the Temple HPOG employer engagement committee and shares with other committee members best practices on building more effective partnerships with the HPOG program and students.

Ms. Connell interviews all internship applicants, just as she would interview job applicants, and discusses how she started out in the field, what the field requires, and what opportunities exist in the field. A discussion then takes place with the HIP Career Placement Coordinators for the specifics of what the learning contract will contain. Ms. Connell starts the interns out with work on the basic level and later guides them to more complex functions. Student progress with the internship is monitored by the Career Placement Coordinators for the duration of the experience. Ms. Connell offers the interns letters of reference in their job searches and job consideration when they complete the program.

Since forming this partnership, Ms. Connell has offered internships to more than 25 students and has been instrumental in helping students obtain and retain employment. This fall, she offered two internship slots in Coding to students who have recently passed their American Health Information Management Association Certified Coding Associate (AHIMA-CCA) exam, the certificate that a student in Tier 2 can earn. A typical internship requires 20 hours per week for 6 to 12 weeks. The Coding internships offer students experience in scanning, processing 1500 insurance claims, using the GE/IDX billing system, managing charge tickets and key data, printing explanation of benefits (EOB), reconciliation, and data entry verified insurance claims. The first student to pass her AHIMA-CCA was just hired by Ms. Connell as a Financial Analyst in Health Information.

The Tier 1 internship gives students who have completed entry level course work in Medical Office and Accounts hands-on experience in CMS-1500 insurance claims, EOB research, and gathering information of benefits and back-up information for credits owed. Rotations in the Billing and Coding units give the students an all-around experience in a busy physician billing office that handles bills from the Temple University Health System.

Promising Practice: Career Pathways Approach
Temple University–Center for Social Policy and Community Development
Health Information Professions (HIP) Career Pathways Initiative

This grantee selected health information technology as a career pathway. The grant provides the opportunity to offer education and training at multiple levels. There are five tiers in Temple University's Center for Social Policy and Community Development's (CSPCD) Health Information Professions (HIP) career initiative. Tier 1, Administrative/Billing/Coding and Electronic Health Records, provides opportunity to achieve four certifications, including the National Association for Health Professionals (NAHP) Certified Coding Specialist (CCS) and Certified Administrative Health Assistant (CAHA); Digital Personal Record Certification and ICDL (International Computer Driver's License Training). Tier 1 is taught collaboratively by Temple CSPCD and 1199C Training & Upgrading Fund. Tier 2 is a new certification program at Temple CSPCD which will train for attainment of the American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA) Certified Coding Associate (CCA), which is highly regarded by doctors' offices and hospitals hiring for Health Information Technicians. Currently there are two options at Tier 2: (1) a condensed 8-month course at Temple; (2) an 18-month (three semesters) program provided by Camden County College in partnership with 1199C Training Fund with credits that count towards an Associate's Degree. Tier 3 is at the community college level, where students can earn credits for associate level programs or earn credits that apply to Tier 4. Tier 4 is Temple University's Health Information Management (HIM) program, a Bachelor's degree program. Tier 5 is a Master's level Health Informatics program also at Temple. Before this grant program, there had not been the opportunity to provide stackable credentials across an entire career pathway.

HIP coordinates with Philadelphia's local workforce infrastructure to recruit TANF individuals and others in the targeted population. HIP employs a comprehensive orientation process to assess skills, determine what supportive services may be needed, and identify students who are likely to be successful in this career path. A critical question the HIP career coach explores with students before they attend an orientation is whether they are seeking degrees or certifications. Certifications are awarded for Tiers 1 and 2 and degrees are awarded for Tiers 3, 4, and 5.

Once a student is enrolled, a HIP career coach completes an intake assessment with the student. Students are assigned a coach who will work with them for the duration of the program, meeting weekly to assess students' goals and needs. The career coach also works with students to develop goal plans and to modify those plans as they progress through the program. Additional support for students comes from an academic enhancement/personal effectiveness instructor who provides supportive education and training in workplace competency and the HIP career placement coordinators who work with students and employers to provide internship experiences and employment/career opportunities.

It can be a lengthy process to develop a Career Pathways approach as there are numerous components to consider. For example, the HIP articulation coordinator, responsible for articulation agreements between community colleges and Temple University, met with the area

community colleges to determine which classes would be needed to transfer into the HIM program at Temple and which classes were available at a local community college. Developing and signing the agreements often required multiple rounds of meetings and coordination among the partners. Point persons at each community college were identified so that the communication process regarding the agreements would be more streamlined and efficient. Temple estimates that they have currently spent 1.5 years working on the articulation agreements and still have two agreements pending.

Challenges in developing a Career Pathways approach have been the initial coordination and establishing a system of communications among potential strategic partners. Specifically, it has been challenging in some ways to create the mutual buy-in for a career pathway. The grantee has had to demonstrate the specific benefits of the approach to community colleges, as well as to prospective students. For students, the value is that the pathway approach identifies concrete steps that can be taken for upward career mobility. To demonstrate the value of the career pathways model the grantee has developed informational materials including brochures, one-page fliers for each tier, and a website. These materials help people understand all the services that are offered to participants.

For grantees considering building and implementing a Career Pathways approach, Temple offers the following steps:
1. Use local Labor Market Information (LMI) to identify a viable/growth industry sector on which to base the Career Pathway approach.
2. Determine where participants will enter the system and the steps in the pathway.
3. Convene strategic partners who will provide the various educational opportunities at each of the steps or tiers of the career pathway. In the current grantee example, Tiers 1 and 2 were programs that could be provided internally with an education and training partner, 1199C Training Fund, through the HPOG program but Tier 3 required reaching out to community colleges for courses, curricula, and Associate Degree programs that fit the career pathway. With Tiers 4 and 5 the grantee leveraged its relationship with Temple's HIM department. CSPCD and the HIM Program are both part of the College of Health Professions and Social Work (CHPSW) at the University and had previously worked together to develop a similar model which proved to be invaluable in the implementation of HIP.
4. Engage employers appropriate to each level of the career path.
5. Develop Memoranda of Understanding with all of the project's strategic partners.